

Sins of secrecy

■ A Watkins Glen man, deeply scarred by abuses that happened in 1966, confronts his memories.

■ The priest who molested him, shuffled around his former diocese, struggles with his past.

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It was August 1992 and John Hayes was sitting with friends in a small cafe in Saratoga.

As a priest walked by their table, Hayes blurted out, "Priests molest children."

His friends were horrified. Hayes himself was shocked: "I didn't know where that came from or why," he said.

Hayes, who had already been in therapy for a few years, told his therapist about the incident and then dismissed it.

But a few months later, in November, Hayes picked up a book written by Jason Berry, "Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Catholic Priests and Sexual Abuse of Children." It brought back memories hidden deep in his childhood in Watkins Glen about being sexually abused by a Catholic priest.

"I could relate to everything in that book," Hayes said.

He said feelings of nausea and anxiety swept over him. In a panic, he called his therapist.

"My therapist told me the feeling I experienced that day is what I felt then," Hayes said.

Hayes, 45, now assistant district attorney in Schuyler County, also sought a legal remedy to the acts committed against him as a child.

In 1993 he filed a complaint and eventually settled out of court for \$70,000. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester and the former priest who has admitted to abusing Hayes paid the bill. In the past several months, similar incidents of abuse have come to light nationwide, and so have allegations that the Catholic Church knew it had problem



Photo illustration by MILES B. NORMAN/Star-Gazette

priests and quietly moved them from parish to parish.

Although Hayes' settlement with the diocese included a stipulation that he not comment publicly about the abuse or the settlement, he said he decided to do so anyway as part of his healing

process.

Hayes is angry because he feels the Catholic Church has gone for decades "acting with callous indifference to all concerned, not offering an apology or an acknowledgment of the abuse, opting instead to pay for silence."

Hayes, who grew up in Watkins Glen, said the church "must suffer the children whose lives it ruined, suffer the pain they bear into old age, and suffer, too, the consequences of its ignorance."

See ABUSE/11A

Editor's note

Last month, John Hayes approached Star-Gazette reporter Jennifer Kingsley with his story of being abused by a Catholic priest when he was a child.

Hayes said he came forward now to help with his healing process and the healing of others. His story and the story of his abuser, John Gormley, are told here for the first time as the Star-Gazette examines the local impact of what has become a national crisis in the Catholic Church.

A child model posed for the photo illustration that accompanies these stories.

We encourage you to talk to your children about these stories; a column by psychologist Dr. Rachel Bryant on Page 10A offers advice on how to answer questions your children might have.

Inside

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"This is a secret, that's what he told me. A secret between (Gormley), God and me. So I didn't tell anyone."

John Hayes



Sins of secrecy



Abuse: Confronting memories

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John Hayes' parents, Carroll and Elizabeth Hayes, often brought members of the clergy into their home, including John Gormley, pastor of St. Mary's of the Lake in Watkins Glen.

"(Gormley) was a charismatic, compassionate man and we welcomed him into our family," Elizabeth Hayes said. "He was an easy fit, often bringing books for the children."

Gormley became a frequent guest in the Hayes family home and was liked and admired by John Hayes, who was 9 at the time.

But in 1966, Gormley said, he was going to be reassigned to St. John Evangelist Church in Clyde.

Hayes made it clear that he wanted to be an altar boy, and he wanted Gormley to teach him. What Hayes says happened next continues to haunt him.

On at least two occasions that Hayes can recall, Gormley sexually abused Hayes in the boy's Watkins Glen home, in his own bed.

After a dinner party one evening, Gormley slipped into Hayes' bed and told the boy he needed to lie down with him.

Gormley then fondled Hayes. "I remember him placing my hand on his own genitals and thinking 'Ugh, what is that?'" Hayes said. "It was almost as if I checked out of my body at that point."

Hayes remembers focusing on the ceiling and a painting, but the other details aren't clear.

"I thought what was going on was an unbelievably bizarre, almost surreal thing having to do with being an altar boy," Hayes said. "This is a secret, that's what he told me. A secret between (Gormley), God and me. So I didn't tell anyone."

A trip to confessional follows abuse

A similar incident occurred when Gormley took Hayes on an overnight trip. While Gormley admits now that he knew what he was doing was wrong, the 9-year-old Hayes didn't know what was happening.

The day after the second incident, Gormley, then 33, took Hayes to confession at a nearby rectory.

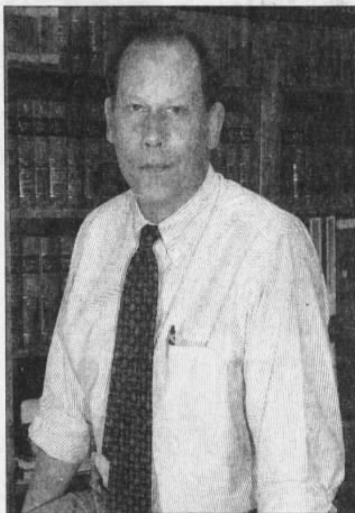
Once inside, Hayes said, Gormley went into another room with a priest, and he remained there for some time.

"I didn't know what to think," Hayes said. "I thought this was a test to prepare me for being an altar boy."

Hayes believes Gormley told the priest what had transpired the night before.

When it was Hayes' turn to go into the confessional, he said the other priest simply asked him if he was OK. Hayes said he told the priest he was all right and the priest responded by saying, "Well, there's really nothing we need to talk about."

Hayes said no one informed his



JEFF RICHARDS/Star-Gazette

John Hayes was 9 years old when he was sexually abused by a Catholic priest in 1966. In 1993, the Diocese of Rochester and the priest who abused him agreed to pay Hayes \$70,000.

parents about the sexual abuse and he repressed the memories for nearly 30 years.

Priest seeks counseling, leaves church

As Hayes planted the memory deep in his mind, Gormley sought help.

Gormley, now 69, said he wished he'd been given the appropriate guidance and help when he first asked for it in 1967 while he was at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, when he recognized his attraction to boys.

The diocese would not comment about Hayes or Gormley, but offered a general response.

During the 1960s and 1960s, sexual abuse wasn't thought of as a psychiatric problem; it was considered more of a moral lapse, treatable with retreats and spiritual counseling, said Michael Tedesco, spokesman for the Rochester Diocese.

"(Sexual abuse) is widely understood now, but the understanding was much different during that time period," Tedesco said. "The literature (then) was much different than today."

"It was thought the behavior could be easily corrected," Tedesco added. "Looking back now, that's

not the case. We know it has to be dealt with differently."

Bishop Matthew Clark of the Rochester Diocese said officials are trying to learn signs to be alert to when reviewing priests' records.

"We're learning from our mistakes," Clark said.

During the era Gormley was ordained, there was no preparation for a life of celibacy, he maintains. "It was just assumed that you understood," Gormley said.

Gormley said that while he was at St. Bernard's Seminary there was no psychological screening for seminarians.

That has changed over time.

"We've been doing that for years," Tedesco said.

In July 1983, Clark acknowledged the problem of sexual abuse among clergy and wrote a letter to members of the diocese, stating, "Relatively few clerics engage in such destructive behavior, but the mere possibility of abuse demands that diocesan policy and procedures in this area be clear and widely known."

At that time, Tedesco said, a priest facing allegations of sexual abuse would be removed from a parish, stripped of his responsibilities and placed in a supervised clerical or administrative setting.

This year, Clark has taken the pol-

Local priests accused

The following priests who served in the Southern Tier have been implicated in a nationwide sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church:

■ The Rev. Joseph Brodnick, chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira, resigned in April after it was learned he was accused of sexually abusing a teen-age girl in Ohio in the 1970s.

■ The Rev. Thomas W. Burr, pastor of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads, resigned in May because of an allegation of sexual misconduct that was more than 20 years old.

■ The Rev. Thomas Corbett, who was working in an administrative job at the Diocese of Rochester's tribunal office, was removed from his post in May. He

allegedly abused an Elmira girl in 1974 and '75 when she attended religion classes at St. Mary's Church on Elmira's Southside.

To report abuse

Anyone who wishes to report sexual misconduct should call the following numbers.

■ Within the Diocese of Rochester: Barbara Pedeville, 585/328-3228, Ext. 215; the Rev. Bob Ring, 315/536-7459. Toll-free, diocesan Pastoral Center, 800/368-7177.

■ Within the Diocese of Scranton: The Rev. Joseph Kopalcz, vicar for priests, office, 570/563-8507; the Rev. James Earley, chancery office, 570/207-2216.

■ Within the Diocese of Syracuse: Bishop James Moynihan, 315/422-7203. The office is hiring a victim advocate.



RAY FINGER/Star-Gazette

John Gormley served at St. Mary's Church in Corning starting in 1962, the same year he sought counseling to control his sexual and psychological problems.



JEFF RICHARDS/Star-Gazette

John Gormley was a priest at St. Mary's of the Lake in Watkins Glen for just one year, starting in June 1965.

Former priest, victim reflect on past

For John Hayes' mother, Elizabeth, the remedies now offered by the Catholic Church have come too late.

"If the Catholic Church had been a little more stringent at the time, things would not have snowballed the way they have," Elizabeth Hayes said.

The Hayes family left the church during the late 1970s, many years before they learned about the sexual abuse that occurred in their home.

Hayes said he doesn't go to church

anymore. Instead, he said, "I see God through nature and the kindness of others every day."

Gormley also left the Catholic Church and the priesthood in 1971.

"It was a liberating experience," Gormley said. "I don't feel any hatred or anger toward the church; I just want to move forward, maintaining my health and contributing to life."

Gormley said the secrecy of the Catholic Church "has to go." He also said he feels compassion for those who are suffering.

Hayes said the sexual abuse and emotional trauma are the reasons he never married, had children or became involved in an intimate relationship.

As for others who have been sexually abused, Hayes said, "They lost their God, their trust and their self-assurance. They lost peace of mind. They lost more than anyone who has not lived in their skins can ever know."

"Relatively few clerics engage in such destructive behavior, but the mere possibility of abuse demands that diocesan policy and procedures in this area be clear and widely known."

Bishop Matthew Clark, Rochester Diocese

"If the Catholic Church had been a little more stringent at the time, things would not have snowballed the way they have."

Elizabeth Hayes, John Hayes' mother



Sins of secrecy

Decades of sadness and pain for former priest

■ Struggling for years to control his behavior toward young boys.

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BURDETT — The former Catholic priest who admitted to molesting John Hayes in 1966 and other boys in the 1950s and 1960s said he has struggled for more than 30 years to deal with his compulsive behavior.

"My life has been filled with remorse, regret and sorrow because of the damage, hurt and confusion in others resulting from my behavior years ago," said John Gormley, 48, who now lives in Burdett. "I am also saddened and personally burdened by the way the church handled this problem in the past."

Gormley's pastoral appointments

The appointments of John Gormley, former Catholic priest:

- June 1959 — Holy Redeemer Church, Rochester.
- June 1962 — St. Mary's Church, Corning.
- June 1965 — St. Mary's of the Lake, Watkins Glen.
- June 1966 — St. John Evangelist, Clyde.
- June 1967 — Rural outreach program, Galilee House, serving Tioga and Tompkins counties.
- June 1969 — Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester grants Gormley a leave of absence at his request.
- June 1971 — Gormley is allowed to leave the priesthood.

to deal with bouts of depression and thoughts of suicide. "I've had many, many suicidal thoughts, but never an attempt, during the worst parts of my despair," Gormley said.

He said he recognized early in his pastoral career that he had a sexual attraction to underage boys.

Knowing he was unfit

Gormley said that in 1957, two years before he was to be ordained, he consulted with the spiritual director at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester because he feared he was unfit for the priesthood. An incident occurred with an adolescent boy and Gormley said he wanted help to control his sexual compulsivity.

Instead, Gormley said, he was told that his problem required prayer and spiritual discipline, but that it wasn't a barrier to keep him from being ordained.

In 1959, when he was 26, Gormley was ordained and assigned to Holy Redeemer Church in Rochester, where Gormley said inappropriate sexual activity happened again.

"It was like friendships that became inappropriately sexualized," Gormley said. "There wasn't a rape, just inappropriate touching."

Gormley said that after each incident he would take the boy to confession with him because he was desperate for help from the diocese and distraught over his problem.

Time after time, Gormley said, he was given absolution through confession, but his sexual problem remained a secret.

In 1962, his last year in Rochester, Gormley said, "A priest finally asked if I would like some help from outside the rectory."

Gormley said he was relieved that his problem was being recognized.

Later that year, Gormley was assigned to St. Mary's in Corning where he was an associate pastor. On his own initiative, Gormley sought counseling from a psychiatrist in Binghamton to control his sexual and psy-

March 19, 1993

John,

The chance encounter last week on Tupper when I had gone to get water from the spring, offered me the occasion to do something that I have known how or when to do.

And that is to acknowledge to you the regret and remorse on my part for events in the past which were gross violations of your privacy, your inner goodness and of your parents' trust.

I am ashamed, and truly sorry for the trauma and pain that this has caused you years. I fully understand and accept you of the other day.

In 1972 I spent six months in residential therapeutic treatment in a psychiatric center in Hartford, Ct. in order to deal with the past that gave rise to behavior which was both a

JEFF RICHARDS/Star-Gazette

John Gormley sent this letter apologizing to John Hayes in 1993 after Hayes and his sister encountered Gormley having car trouble on a winter day.

Priest's letter of apology

By JENNIFER KINGSLEY
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WATKINS GLEN — More than three decades have passed since John Hayes was sexually abused during his altar boy training, and the Catholic church has never apologized.

"Victims of the predators have waited a very long time for that simple act from the church," said Hayes, who is Schoyler County's assistant district attorney.

One person, however, has apologized: John Gormley, the former priest who molested Hayes in 1966. Gormley's letter arrived in the mail in March 1993, after a chance encounter with Hayes along Texas

Hollow Road, near Odesa. Hayes was riding in his sister's car, near Hayes' home, when the pair stopped for a motorist stuck in the snow. It was Gormley.

When Hayes recognized Gormley, he refused to get out of the car. Hayes' sister, Mary Hayes-O'Brien, helped Gormley instead.

Gormley wrote, "The chance encounter last week... offers me the occasion to do something that I have not known how or when to do."

"I am ashamed, and truly sorry for the confusion, trauma and pain that this has caused you over the years. I fully understand and accept your reaction the other day," Gormley wrote.

Gormley also wrote that in 1972 he spent six months in residential

therapeutic treatment in a psychiatric center in Hartford, Conn., in order to "deal with the pathology that gave rise to the behavior which was both sick and criminal."

In the letter, Gormley referred to the sexual abuse as a "gross violation of (Hayes') privacy, innocence, goodness, and parents' trust."

"I will carry the burden of my regret and shame to the grave," Gormley wrote. "I hope that this acknowledgment may serve to separate each of us more fully from the past and from each other, and help to bring some additional measure of healing and peace to both of us."

"It was like friendships that became inappropriately sexualized. There wasn't a rape, just inappropriate touching"

Former priest John Gormley

chological difficulties.

Gormley spent four years in Corning and during his last year, his behavior was no longer a secret. Gormley said there was a discussion with the senior pastor about his compulsion. The senior pastor sent Gormley back to Rochester.

"I told the diocese that I was seeing a psychiatrist in Binghamton and that I wanted to continue seeing that psychiatrist," Gormley said. "That's when I was assigned to Watkins Glen."

It was in Watkins Glen that Gormley met Carroll and Elizabeth Hayes.

Breaking a family's trust

The Hayes family often entertained members of the clergy in their home, including Gormley. That's also where an inappropriate relationship began between Gormley and their 9-year-old son, John Hayes.

John was the youngest boy I had a relationship with," Gormley said. "I've always felt terrible about that."

Gormley said his relationships were usually with two-age boys. Gormley was training John Hayes to be an altar boy.

During the next few years, Gormley said, he continued to struggle with his behavior, often seeking absolution from the confessional.

In 1966, Gormley moved to St. John Evangelist in Clyde, and later opted for a rural ministry outreach called Galilee House, which served Tioga and Tompkins counties.

Gormley said feelings of deep remorse and suicidal thoughts consumed his life. In 1968, the diocese granted Gormley a leave of absence.

"It was during that period I continued the search for help," said Gormley, noting that he lived outside the diocese at that time.

Two years later, Gormley was allowed to leave the priesthood.

"I was penniless, working as a waiter," Gormley said. "The only education I had was from the seminary."

That same year, 1971, Gormley met and married his wife. He said he told her about his past and she encouraged Gormley to check himself into a residential treatment center in Hartford, Conn. He stayed there for seven months in 1972.

Through the years, Gormley has operated his own business and held teaching positions, most recently as an adjunct professor in the continuing education department at Elmira College, where he taught stress management, interpersonal relations and alcohol and drug management courses.

He resigned from Elmira College last month when his past was brought to the attention of the administration.

"They didn't ask for my resignation," Gormley said about Elmira College's administrative panel. "I offered it so they wouldn't have to ask."

Finding a way to heal

"I have worked over 30 years in ongoing therapy to achieve and then maintain recovery," Gormley said. "I have tried to work for reconciliation with those involved whenever possible, made amends the best I could, respected confidentiality, and sought ways to contribute productively to society."

Gormley said the support and love of his wife, family, friends and colleagues, and the help of mental health professionals helped make his recovery possible.

"I thank them for that," he said.

Gormley said he understands that having adults disclose they were abused as children or adolescents, and even confront their abusers, helps the healing process, and should be encouraged.

"I hope that I can contribute to the healing process and to find lasting solutions to this serious problem with honesty, openness and compassion for all involved," Gormley said.

He hopes that by telling his side of the story, "that we can all learn to work together to provide help and healing to all others so affected and so afflicted and to find solutions to this serious problem in an atmosphere of reconciliation and compassion rather than of alienation."